

THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN PROVIDING RESIDENTIAL CARE FACILITIES

By: A. C. Grady

When Mr. Wright asked me to undertake this function I felt reasonably sure that here was one place that the church had been a leader. Certainly, this was one place where the church had caught a vision and had led the way. While some fine work has been done by our Roman Catholic and Lutheran brothers, it didn't take too long for my optimism to be curbed and my visions of bragging punctured and brought back to earth. Now thoroughly chastened or as chastened as I can be, I hope to share with you some of the things that we are striving to do in the American Baptist Convention.

This afternoon I am speaking for a small segment of the Christian church - called Baptists. For those not familiar with the Baptist myth, I may not speak for the Baptists but express only my own personal opinions concerning a particular problem. Yet, today, I do speak for one of the major denominations in this country, the American Baptist Convention and more particularly, the American Baptist Home Mission Society through its Division of Health and Social Ministries. While the Home Mission Society has many responsibilities, housing is one area that we have a certain amount of competence. Our Home Mission Society and Division have related to it 10 hospitals, 1 nursing home, 13 children's homes, 56 retirement centers and homes for the aging with a total of 6653 beds (while we talk of beds we prefer to think of them as living units) and \$23,030,947 spent on services. Recently, we entered the lower middle class housing by taking over 9 housing complexes with 85 buildings having 1453 living units. We have men who are specialists in the field of housing and who are willing to serve wherever needed. While our policy has not been firmed up as the only way to do it, it is the beginning of several ways in which we will attempt to serve those who need help.

If I read the Old and New Testaments correctly, we have a responsibility to help those who for one reason or another, are incapable of helping themselves. This is true of the Old Testament with its demands on the individual to do what is right and to walk upright before God. Found in Isaiah 61:1 is: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, For the Lord has anointed me; He has sent me to bring good news to the lowly, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release the prisoners;" The New Testament tells us in a passage of the Gospel according to St. Matthew what a master had to say to his people: "For when I was hungry, you gave me food, when I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink, when I was a stranger, you invited me to your homes, when I had no clothes, you gave me clothes, when I was sick, you looked after me, when I was in prison, you came to see me." This was addressed to the upright who was caught" by surprise because he had been so busy doing what he should have been doing that he didn't recognize whom he was serving.

If the church had really been serious about healing the wounds of the world rather than competition, similar to our race with other nations to be the first one on the moon, we might find ourselves in a more comfortable position. It has been my feeling that in this enlightened age that we dwell in, that the problems of mental retardation were understood.

As a pastor of a small church, I became involved along with the church in the founding of a sheltered workshop using one of our buildings. We had hoped to train the mentally retarded to enter competitive employment but the workshop has taken on a look of a terminal one as most of the trainees are severely handicapped. With the success of the workshop there was the brooding by myself and family members as to what was going to happen to these trainees when their parents were no longer able to help them. Parents have a dread of the day when they have to face this problem. The reluctance to turn the "child" over to the state schools is a natural one. The anxieties concerning the "child" have real foundation in what shall I do.

I had assumed that at least parents, politicians and some others had come to realize that a major change has taken place. With undue optimism I felt that church members had received the message that there were mentally retarded and that they were in all the churches and in all church communities. In order to help us with our surveys of needs in one of our Midwestern states, we sent out a questionnaire to pastors and churches. It had a twofold purpose: 1) To obtain information concerning the number of persons in their particular community that needed help in one of the three areas: a) day care, b) sheltered workshop, c) sheltered care. 2) To help the church family to become aware of the needs of people who might not be in the fellowship.

One pastor turned his responsibility over to a fine old church member who answered, "thank God, our church has no mentally retarded members." Perhaps I am too hard on this person and her church because I feel that there may be no mentally retarded in that particular community but I have a strong feeling that there is a retarded, stunted spiritual life and I might go so far as to predict that the church is already dead while waiting for an appropriate time for its funeral service.

Because the church did not see its responsibility a vacuum was created in to which the state had to move. It moved originally to help the individual by trying to prepare him or her for life in an agricultural economy. Farms were opened where the mentally ill and retarded were to learn the various jobs and after a while move back into the society. With the advent of a scare philosophy, the schools became institutions for the hiding of retarded bodies and minds. The buildings were designed to be custodial in nature. Society was to be defended from the mental defective. It was hoped that the problem would disappear. The Presidential Panel on Mental Retardation of 1963 had some things to say concerning the custodial castles that had been built. "It is fallacious because it is based on the assumption that the individual who is to be institutionalized is to be placed there permanently. Unfortunately, experience with large institutions has confirmed this expectation for the simple reason that the handicaps placed upon achieving the clinical objective of returning the individual as near to normality as possible due to the tremendous press of the administrative complexity of such institutions are overwhelming. In fact such institutions "train" people for the institutional life rather than for life in the community. If, on the other hand, the economic procedure is to be returning the individual to "normality," the economic procedure, both in the sense of saving dollars as well as human resources, is to plan and operate these facilities with the clinical objective in the forefront." (P. 48, Report of the Task force on Prevention, Clinical Services and Residential Care.)

If Marvin Kohn of the Montgomery, Pennsylvania, Association for Retarded Persons is correct, it costs \$2,628 to keep one child one year in a Pennsylvania state school or hospital. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania spends \$31,000,000 per year to maintain nine state schools and hospitals. Compare this individual cost to 12 times \$2,628 as over against the cost of \$9,600 to send a child through 12 years of public school in Pennsylvania. So, for too many years lives have been wasted with the old philosophy that these morons, imbeciles and idiots are a threat to society.

With the awakening of the general population concerning the needs of the person who is mentally retarded, the church became aware of its role. For too many years, there has been too much of a loss in personal lives, skills and productivity of persons with mental handicaps. When the return of the individual to society is viewed from a Christian perspective, namely, the person has value in the eyes of God, there is something especially overwhelming when potential redemption is aborted by forces beyond the control of the individual.

We, in the American Baptist Home Mission Society, are committed to the policy of small group homes so arranged geographically that they may be administered adequately and programmed more easily. We believe that the retarded person has many of the same needs as does his more normal brother or sister. Whether male or female, there is a need for the male and female figure in its proper balance so that he may in his own way relate to the opposite sex and also to his own in a healthy manner. We feel that we will be able to give the proper type of supervision to houseparents and to pay them well enough to make it a career type job. The key persons, of course, are the houseparents. The house will have a husband-wife team as the houseparents. The "mother" will be responsible for the operation of the home. She will do the supervising, the cooking--and we are looking at the newer types of food preparation--supervising the housekeeping and hopefully, delegating responsibility and work as the "children" would be able to do. It is at this point, we may use older retardates to assist in the food preparation and housekeeping with the thought to train them for service jobs elsewhere. We have some question as to whether we are looking for the older married couple where a good adjustment has been made in marriage with children grown and gone or whether we are looking for young married couples who might be more receptive to direction and whose family includes small children at home. Her husband's function is to be a father figure whose main job is not in the home but out in the community. As with most fathers, he will leave the home in the morning and return in the evening, and assist the mother as with a normal family. There might be one exception and that would be one who might be capable of prevention maintenance for several buildings. We believe that the church-related group home should by its very nature, be of such a caliber that the state licensing agency would have a model to which it might point its finger to both state facilities and other private institutions. This is not to say that we want to run others out of the business, but it does say we feel that standards need to be lifted so that the mentally retarded person is looked upon as a person with needs and not as another bed to be filled or any other philosophy which you might support.

We are committed to as many small homes as necessary to assist the person with the mental handicap to adjust and become within his ability a productive citizen. This could mean that one of the homes might cater to the individual



who is in the rehabilitation program of the state. Here he might live in one of our facilities for 18 months while being studied and then continue if the rehabilitation program is continued. If he doesn't fit the program of the rehabilitation agency, then he would be prepared for a change to another type of home in the vicinity where he would be given a chance in one of the terminal workshops and then, if satisfied, live out his days in dignity and with a feeling of worth.

Another type of home as we see it, would be the home facility near the medical center, where the mentally retarded person could be sent for a period of time to correct, if possible, some of the various physical problems and to make necessary corrections so that he might live more happily. When this part of his program would be completed, then we would wish to move him or her to another facility where another type of program would help to develop the individual to his utmost.

So you can see, we are talking of a comprehensive type of program in which needs of individuals might be met. We feel that the church-related program of housing can better help the person develop than the large impersonal institution where the needs of the institution must be met before the needs of the individual. This is not intended to knock the present state programs because they have answered a need, primarily a custodial one over the past 70 or 80 years. I was really brought up short when I read some of the intents of the early epileptic, and then the schools for backward. Many of the aims of that day are the aims that we are coming to in our own time. Somewhere down the line, we, as a nation, became untracked and the schools became nothing more than places to hide the bodies that we didn't want out in society. However, what I am saying is that we can help the state institutions to become what they were first intended for, namely, institutions for research in the problem of mental retardation and to free them from the other needs that hamper their progress. The answer, then, as we see it is the group home with the necessary facilities nearby. When these facilities are not nearby, then, we shall have to of necessity move from the operation of sheltered care into the type of day care and workshop experience that is necessary.

While these homes are non-sectarian, they are not non-religious. We intend to tie the homes in with the churches of the area. While this program would be too much for a local church, which of necessity must keep its own program staffed and operating, it is designed to help the church help its own. In this manner the home will call on those churches nearby—regardless of their denominational loyalties—to accept these friends with compassion and understanding. We will assist the local churches in programming religious education for the mentally retarded of the community.

We feel this is a feasible program if done in a cluster of seven homes or more in a geographical area not to exceed 16 or so in each residence. We feel it is feasible and financially possible and could bring about a training program where our people are trained for housekeeping and non-technical nurses aid training, which will make them available for our hospitals, nursing homes, retirement centers and even children's homes. You see we are selfish. With the labor pool as it is in some areas, this is an area that needs real development.